

THE WHITE HOUSE
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Outline for Talk to NSC, January 18, 19621. Object of the talk:

a. to be sure that the senior officers of the Executive Branch, in National Security affairs, all have some understanding of our major policies. We are a team -- and it is essential that all of us work together in the same direction. You and your immediate subordinates have a real need-to-know what we are trying to do.

b. to ensure that we are all clear about the basic positions we shall be urging and explaining with Congress and with public opinion. I know that each of you gets regular information on decisions and policies in his own area, but it is important for those of us who circulate among members of Congress and the press and foreign embassies to be sure we know the Government's policy.

2. Basic Foreign Policy

It is not just talk when we say in the State of the Union message that our object is a world of free and interdependent states. That is exactly what we want and what the Communists cannot tolerate.

Nor is it just talk that we can stand to have them choose for themselves. We are proud of our improved relations with countries like India, in spite of the Goa episode; and the annoyance of the Belgrade meeting does not prevent us from seeking useful connections even with noisy neutrals.

We do not recognize any flat priority as between one group of friends and another. Circumstances will have to guide us in individual cases. Nevertheless we do rate very highly the problem of

3. Unity and Strength in the Atlantic Community

You all know of the trade fight that is ahead, and you know also of the standing test in Berlin. Let me just say that these are obviously of the first importance:

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At the same time, we must all be alert against the self-interested noises made by even friendly governments from time to time

and we must be careful to frame our policies in terms of American interests and American leadership. We are bound to pay the price of leadership -- we may as well have some of its advantages. So it is American policy that we must work for. Fortunately, in Europe, it is pretty clear. We mean to hold our own in Berlin; we mean to work for increased European unity; we mean to strengthen conventional forces; we mean to keep the nuclear deterrent up-to-date. This last one, I know, opens complex problems, and I am glad that many of you are at work on them.

4. Basic Military Policy

(This is an edgy one, but I believe a few sentences would be enormously helpful in setting the stage for further work by others)

We have, as you know, greatly reinforced the national defense forces. We have done this both in conventional and in nuclear forces. But you should understand that I do not believe in general war as the answer to every situation in which we have a temporary or local inferiority. I believe in maintaining our nuclear forces: first, as a deterrent against any nuclear madness by the enemy and, second, as a restraint upon adventures that would be so important as to require drastic response from us. But I do not believe in any "full first-strike capability," and I do not subscribe to the doctrine of long-term "nuclear superiority." I am always ready to hear argument on these matters, but what I have heard so far convinces me that in the long run we are headed for a nuclear stalemate -- always assuming we can avoid a nuclear holocaust. It is for this reason that I am so strong a supporter of revived and reinforced conventional forces.

This is the real threat we face today -- as long as we maintain effective deterrent strength we need not worry about general war, in my judgment -- and on this one we need to do a lot more than we yet have.

This military policy is likely to involve us in some combat with the Congress this year. Sentiment for more missiles and more nuclear weapons is pretty strong -- I don't think such sentiment can be rationally defended, but there it is. You should all know that Mr. McNamara and I have set our force goals after a most careful analysis of all that the potential enemy is doing or may be able to do. The totals we have set are all we need -- with a comfortable margin of safety. To be honest with you, we would probably be safe with less -- but we believe in an ample safety factor. The United States is in no danger whatever of falling "behind" in this area. Our intelligence reports, and our accelerated programs, give ground for confidence on this vital matter. We plan to keep ahead -- as far ahead as it makes any sense to try to be, in the thermonuclear age.

5. Basic Economic Policies

This Administration is strongly in favor of foreign aid -- and we are asking a lot of it this year. Let me emphasize, however, that our whole position on this one is a cool and practical one. I do not want to find any of us backing programs that just cannot be defended in Congress, and I think our whole policy on AID should be to show that businesslike, hardheaded, energetic, and practical administration is not only what we intend -- but what gets results.

Just as an example of what I mean: I think that as far as possible our Development Loans should carry some visible rate of interest. It is not the money that matters; it is the evidence of hard-headed seriousness. It is easier not to charge interest, but it is shortsighted from the point of view of long-term Congressional support.

On the other hand I do not expect our Administration to shy away from all unpopular decisions in the AID field on domestic political grounds. It is a matter of judgment. ~~SECRET~~

When you are in doubt on a matter of this sort, take the time to send the question upstairs -- that is the sort of judgment I get paid to make, and the White House is now geared to arrange prompt decisions. (FYI, this is said by the old hands to be a major change from the olden times.)

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But our biggest problem is TRADE. Here we have a major set of proposals to put through, and the whole Administration will be needed. But rather than make a speech about that today, I am asking Mr. Ball and Mr. Petersen to make very sure that all of you -- and many more of our senior officers -- are fully informed so that you can bear a hand whenever you get a chance.

6. Some Specific Current Problems

a. The Congo

We have every reason to be clear and proud about our Congo policy, but we also need to speak about it with one voice. The object has not been to "crush Tshombe," or to back every last action of the UN. The object has been to find a decent path toward peace and to prevent Soviet infiltration. In this the UN has been indispensable, unless we were to have a dangerous great-power confrontation, or a split between Europeans and blacks. Adoula has proved himself our best hope and we strongly back him; we are now making real progress with Tshombe, and Gizenga is at a low point. We must avoid recrimination with Struelens or with anyone else. We shall support the UN, without at all giving up our own independent right of judgment and counsel. We should see to it, however, that our case in the Congo is strongly and continuously put forward. It is a clear and practical policy, and at the moment it seems to be working.

b. Laos

When we say that we are working for a "neutral and independent Laos," we mean just that. This policy implies a Souvanna government -- but a Souvanna government with a strong Vientiane participation. We will not support Boun Oum and Phoumi in what we consider to be unreasonable intransigence.

Here again it is fundamental that all parts of the government speak with one voice. I count on each department and agency concerned to support this policy in every way. The alternative was a losing war, in which we should have been without allied support. Governor Harriman in Washington, and Ambassador Brown in Laos -- under my direction -- are the center of our policy and I expect the fullest support for them.

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c. South Viet-Nam

We are embarked on a major effort here, and it is not going to be an easy one. I particularly urge on all senior officers the liveliest attention to day-to-day action in this area. I am glad to see that Bob McNamara is visiting Honolulu at frequent intervals, and I hope that at all levels, and in all fields, our officers in South Viet-Nam will have prompt and active support. Initial reports from the Vietnamese task force show that we are making progress in this area -- but we need to make more.

d. West Irian

We are putting a lot of heat on both parties to get together and reach a peaceful solution through the good offices of U Thant. There are difficult men on both sides. But I think we all have to understand that the real issue here is not West Irian; it is the future of Indonesia.

Our real purpose must be to prevent Indonesia from slipping toward Communism. This may involve us in "unfairness" to the Dutch -- but the stakes here are very high indeed, and the interests of freedom would not be served by a narrow policy of abstract virtue which resulted in turning the rich prize over to the Communists.

e. Cuba

We are on the eve of the Punta del Este meeting, and I have little to add to what I said in my press conference Monday -- except this: that the elimination of Castro communism remains a clear purpose of this Administration. What we do, and do not do, in this area must be guided by the interests of the U. S. as a whole -- but I hope no one will get the notion that this is a matter of indifference to the Government.

f. Berlin

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7. Some Problems of Administrative Practice

We have been at work for a year now, and I think all of us are doing our jobs better. We know each other better; we are more familiar with the problems. I myself am getting better help and response from all the Departments concerned with National Security affairs.

But there are three practices that I want to warn against. Several times in recent months I have asked for recommendations on a problem and had to wait for weeks -- or even months -- for a proper response. The reason, I think, has been disagreement among participating agencies. Let me emphasize to all that I do not mind divided recommendations; I much prefer them to compromises that hide the real issues. I am asking my own staff to keep prodding so that such issues are forced up where I can see them -- and I count on all of you to see to it that the temptation to keep such matters away from the White House is resisted. It is much better to lose a case or two over here than to hide your problems in compromise.

Second, I am strongly against inter-agency or inter-bureau fighting in the press. We have had less of this than other Administrations, but even a little is too much.

Third, there is still too much careless leaking to the press. Some of it is vicious, but most of it is simply foolish. I believe in open doors to the press, but it is always important to be able to say nothing even when it hurts one's ego. I value the quiet men, and I am beginning to know which they are..